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SUBJECT: AMCONSUL MATAMOROS HOSTS UNION, PRIVATE SECTOR AND
GOVERNMENT DISCUSSIONS ON DRUG ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

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11. SUMMARY: On July 20, AmConsul Matamoros hosted a meeting aimed at opening a discussion on ways to prevent drug abuse in general and abuse in the workplace in particular. The meeting was attended by representatives of Mexico,s largest labor federations (CTM), the local president of a national business association, a GOM official (Public Security Secretariat), a concerned parastatal agency and Mission

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Mexico,s Labor Counselor. The idea for such a meeting grew out of a series of ongoing conversations involving Mission Labor Counselor and the CTM on potential areas of increased cooperation between unions and the USG. AmConsul Matamoros enthusiastically embraced the idea of hosting the meeting as a way to further promote the commitment made by Presidents Bush and Calderon in March 2007 to increase US/Mexico border cooperation. All participants at this exploratory meeting expressed strong approval for the idea of a multidisciplinary project involving unions, the private sector and the governments of the US and Mexico. A follow-up meeting to set realistic goals that would avoid duplication of other ongoing efforts related to the problems of drug abuse was set for August 14. If this pilot initiative succeeds it could well serve as a model for expanded union and USG cooperation on other issues and with other posts along the US/Mexico border.

END SUMMARY

UNION/USG COOPERATION

12. Over the past year Mission Mexico,s Labor Counselor has attempted to promote the idea of a more institutionalized relationship between the USG and some of Mexico,s larger labor unions. Until recently the reaction to this idea has been long on promise but short on results. Mexico,s labor unions traditionally operate in a somewhat closed environment that does not extend beyond other union officials, sector employers and Mexican government officials. In recent years, for a variety of reasons, the Mexican unions have had little direct contact with USG officials. Consequently, union officials have been rather hesitant with regards to their interactions with the USG.

13. In time some, although certainly not all, of the unions have begun to open up. One of the ones that have been the most amenable to working with the USG has been the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). The CTM is perhaps the largest federation of labor unions in Mexico and is rough equivalent to the US, AFL-CIO. On several different occasions CTM officials responded affirmatively to suggestions from Mission Mexico,s Labor Counselor that they consider establishing a closer cooperation with the USG. The CTM,s Office of Social Welfare and Ecology seemed the most open to the concept of Union/USG cooperation.

14. The CTM,s Social Welfare Office deals with a variety of issues including those related to such topics as pensions, child labor, women,s (workplace) rights and healthcare. At present one of the CTM,s Social Welfare Office,s main concerns is the issue of drug abuse in the workplace. Labor Counselor therefore agreed to try and work with the union on this issue and proposed serving as a liaison between some of the CTM,s regional offices throughout Mexico and some of the USG,s border posts.

SOME DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM

15. Most Mexicans, including those in the labor sector, now acknowledge that Mexico is no longer simply a drug transit country; it is now also a drug consuming country. The seriousness of the consumer aspects of drug abuse in the workplace in Mexico was recently discussed at the July monthly meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce,s Human Resources and Labor Committee. According to the Committee Chairman, a soon to be released study indicates that at least 12 percent of surveyed Mexican workers acknowledged the use of some form of illegal substance in the workplace within the last 30 days. The Committee Chairman said he could not speak to the study,s methodology as he had not yet received a full

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copy of the finished report. However, as a labor attorney with a strong human resources background, he speculated that if 12 percent of surveyed workers admitted using illegal drugs while at work the percentage was probably much higher. Human nature being what it is, he opined, people often fail to respond truthfully to polls asking about illegal activities.

16. Another Committee member shared with the meeting participants his company,s recent experience hiring new employees in the Mexicali area of Mexico,s Pacific Northwest. The Committee member stated that his firm advertised job openings for 15 new positions. The company received more than 450 applications for the job which did not come as a particular surprise. What did surprise the company was that 215 of the people who passed the initial screening failed a pre-employment drug test. Other aspects of the problems of drug abuse in the work place discussed at the monthly meeting included such themes as drug abuse among corporate executives, absenteeism, increases in job related accidents, theft of company property, violence and drug trafficking on company property.

AMCONSUL MATAMOROS HOSTS MEETING ON DRUGS IN THE WORKPLACE

17. Because Matamoros has recently undertaken other public outreach initiatives on both sides of the US/Mexico border it seemed an ideal choice to approach with the idea of working more closely with unions within its jurisdiction. Matamoros enthusiastically embraced the idea as a way to further build on the commitment made by President Bush and Mexican President Felipe Calderon during their summit in Merida in

March 2007 to increase US/Mexico border cooperation. Consequently, an initial meeting was set of July 20, 2007 and Embassy Mexico's Labor Counselor began communications with CTM officials work out the arrangements for a gathering to take place in Matamoros on that date.

18. During the planning for the July 20 meeting the event eventually developed beyond just a meeting of USG and CTM officials to include a Mexican government representative and an official of a concerned NGO. At the actual meeting the USG was represented by Matamoros, Principal Officer (PO), its Consular Chief, an Economic Officer and the head of the post's FSN employee association and the Embassy Labor Counselor. The CTM was represented by the Secretary General for Maquiladoras in Matamoros and the Coordinator General for Union's Social Welfare Office headquartered in Mexico City. The private sector was represented by the state President of CANACINTRA, a business alliance roughly equivalent to the US's National Association Manufacturers. The GOM was represented by the Director of the federal Public Security Secretariat's (SSP) Crime Prevention office. Finally an NGO

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representative for an organization whose focus is on treatment and rehabilitation called the Center for Youth Integration (CIJ) was present. CIJ is a parastatal agency affiliated with the federal Health Secretariat, and acts as the main implementer of GOM drug demand reduction activities.

AGREEMENT ON A PILOT PROGRAM

19. Under the auspices of Mission Mexico represented by AmConsul Matamoros and the Embassy Labor Counselor, the July 20 meeting brought together labor and capital, as well as both a prevention (the SSP representative) and a treatment (the NGO rep) component to discuss the problems of drug abuse in the workplace. Right from the start it became clear that all meeting participants had ideas and resources that could be brought to the table to address a common concern. It soon became clear that the union, the business association president and the SSP representative were in agreement on many aspects of the problem. Their assessment of the issues involved closely mirror the points mentioned above during the totally separate meeting of the AmCham Human Resources and Labor Committee meeting such as drug abuse among corporate

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executives (they have the ready cash to buy drugs), absenteeism, increased job related accidents, workplace theft, violence and drug trafficking on company property.

10. During the course of the meeting the group settled on the idea of a multidisciplinary project involving unions, the private sector and the governments of the US and Mexico supporting the initiative as appropriate. For example the Matamoros CTM leader offered to assume initial organizational responsibility for the initiative and promised to reach out to other non-CTM unions to invite their participation. The local CANACINTRA President committed his organization to reaching out to other private organizations, such as the Matamoros Rotary's Club. The NGO promised to provide drug awareness training materials and possibly even trainers. Matamoros, PO offered to reach out to her contacts in the two nearest Mexican consulates on the US side of the border and the SSP official offered to serve as the liaison with other relevant GOM agencies.

11. At the end of the meeting the Mexico City CTM official conferred with the participants to work out the next steps in the initiative. The first thing everyone agreed on was the need for a follow-up meeting to set realistic goals. The participants also want to ensure that whatever they attempt would not be duplicative of other ongoing efforts of other organizations or government agencies related to the problems

of drug abuse. The follow-up meeting was set for August 14.

COMMENT

¶12. At present there is no way to tell whether this initial undertaking will produce the results hoped for by the local Matamoros participants. However, from the perspective of fomenting great cooperation and closer ties between posts in Mission Mexico and at least one major Mexican labor federation the meeting in Matamoros got things off to an extremely promising start. If this pilot initiative succeeds it could well serve as a model for expanded labor union and USG cooperation on other issues and with other Mission Mexico posts and add a new and practical element to the overall mission goal of promoting increased US/Mexico cross border cooperation.

¶13. This message was cleared with AmConsul Matamoros.

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